

# 48<sup>TH</sup> U.S. INFANTRY

by Carl Erickson

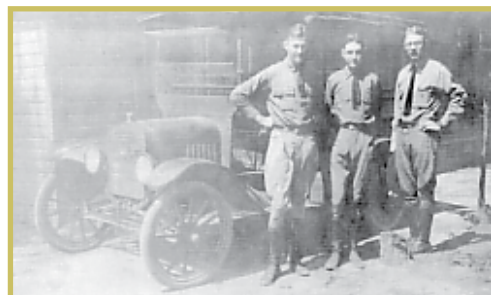


**W**hen the United States entered World War I, the Army possessed thirty-seven regiments of Regular Infantry. Facing a need for additional units, the Army created twenty-seven new regiments with cadres from the existing thirty-seven. One of these new regiments was the 48th Infantry. In May 1917, just over a month after the U.S. declaration of war on Germany, the 48th (and 47th) Infantry were constituted in the Regular Army and organized on the fair grounds at Syracuse, New York. The regimental headquarters was established in the poultry building. Officers slept on the balcony with chicken coops dividing off spaces for privacy, while the enlisted men were quartered in the nearby cattle building.





**ABOVE:** Company L, 48th Infantry, poses for a photograph at Camp Jackson, South Carolina, 14 March 1920. (Photograph in possession of 1-48 Infantry)



**ABOVE RIGHT:** Lieutenant George Ludington and two other officers of the 48th Infantry stand by a truck at Camp Jackson, South Carolina. (Nicholas Ludington)

**RIGHT:** Mounted troops from Company A, 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, fire on the enemy near Epernay, France, 27 August 1944. (National Archives)



Cadre to form the new regiments came by transfer of personnel from the 9th Infantry. The 48th maintained a strong tie with the 9th Infantry, which it recognizes in the upper left corner of its Distinguished Unit Insignia (DUI) by incorporating the design of the 9th's blue shield with argent colored wavy chevron. The 48th was the first in camp to reach maximum strength of 1,916, with recruits from Fort Slocum, New York, Columbus Barracks, Ohio, and men enlisted in Syracuse. In late July, the 48th moved to the mobilization camp about five miles away, but equipment was short. There were no bayonet scabbards, canteen covers, rifle slings, or packs. Tents were in short supply and water had to be hauled in until pipes were installed.

On 14 August, the 9th Infantry was ordered to prepare for overseas service with the 2d Division. Because the 9th had not received its full allotment of recruits, the 48th returned half of its officers and men to the 9th.

In September 1917, the 48th was posted to Camp Hill, and later Camp Stuart, both near Newport News, Virginia, to provide camp and guard duties at this second largest U.S. port of embarkation. Approximately 288,000 doughboys left for Europe and the war from Newport News. In order to carry out its assignments, new recruits filled the vacancies in the 48th's ranks made by transfers to the 9th. Although camp and guard duties were an important task, the soldiers had enlisted to fight the Kaiser and wanted to go to France. One soldier reportedly went AWOL, boarded a ship, and successfully made his way to Europe.

Hopes of going to France were boosted when the 48th was relieved of port guard duty in August 1918 and assigned to the

20th Division forming at Camp Sevier, near Greenville, South Carolina. In the following months, the division underwent intensive training prior to deploying to France where it was to take up positions in the St. Die sector. A typical 48th training day in 1918 started at 0700 and lasted for twelve hours. The training regimen included exercises, classroom instruction, squad and platoon maneuvers, bayonet and grenade instruction, close order drill, musketry, parade, and retreat ceremony.

Although eager to join other American units in France, the war ended on 11 November 1918, by which time only two of the 20th Division units had actually sailed. On 28 February 1919, the 48th was relieved from assignment to the 20th Division and posted to Camp Jackson, South Carolina, where it was active through 1919.

The 48th was posted to Camp Harry J. Jones, Arizona, in 1919 shortly after the adjoining town of Douglas experienced skirmishes between Mexican revolutionaries and U.S. troops. The 48th joined the 1st Cavalry Regiment to protect Douglas until 1921, when the regiment's 1st Battalion was posted in El Paso, Texas. In that same year, the Army faced extensive budget cuts, forcing it to discharge significant numbers of active duty soldiers, including many from the 48th. As a result, the Army decided that those soldiers left in the regiment should be absorbed back

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Soldiers of the 48th Infantry Regiment assemble at their mobilization camp at Syracuse, New York, 7 September 1917. (National Archives)



into the 9th Infantry in San Antonio. The 48th was inactivated at Camp Travis, Texas, on 14 October 1921 and demobilized on 31 July 1922.

On 27 Feb 1942, two months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the 48th was reactivated at Camp (later Fort) Polk, Louisiana, as an armored infantry regiment of the 7th Armored Division. Initial cadre came from the 3d Armored Division's 36th Armored Infantry Regiment. Winter training at Camp Polk was followed by five months of desert warfare training in the Mojave Desert at Camp Coxcomb, California. In August 1943, the 48th was reassigned to Fort Benning, Georgia, and reorganized. On 20 September 1943, the regiment's battalions were given separate designations as armored infantry battalions (AIBs)—the 2d Battalion became the 23d AIB, the 1st Battalion was redesignated as the 38th AIB, and the Headquarters Battalion formed the 48th AIB.

In April 1944, the division moved in preparation for shipment overseas, first to Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts, then to Camp Shanks, New York, and finally to the New York Port of Embarkation to board the *Queen Mary*, which had been converted into a troopship. Sailing on 7 June 1944, the division docked in Greenock, Scotland, on 15 June and later boarded troop trains for their new home at Tidworth Barracks, Wiltshire, England. After final preparations for combat, the division was ordered to France, arriving on the Normandy beaches on 10-14 August.

The 7th Armored Division quickly assumed the offensive. For its actions in France, the French government awarded the 23d AIB (2d Battalion, 48th Infantry) the *French Croix de Guerre* with Palm for seizing fifteen key French cities. The citation that accompanied the award read: "A magnificent unit, full of dash. After operating at an advanced point of the 7th Armored Division from 14 to 31 August 1944, from Mons to Metz, seizing almost without any destruction, 15 important French cities, the unit then gave bloody battle for 6 days on the Moselle, succeeding, in spite of considerable losses, in establishing a bridgehead at Arnaville, assembly area for the attack which liberated Metz."

After spearheading a drive from Chartres to Metz, France, the 7th Armored's infantry battalions were ordered to the First Army for duty in Holland. On 30 September 1944, they were as-

signed to clear the Peel Swamp west of the Maas (Meuse) River. The armored infantrymen experienced some of the bitterest fighting they encountered during the war when they attacked toward Overloon in October 1944.

On 16 December, the 7th Armored Division dashed south to block German advances in the Belgian Ardennes. The Belgian lion rampant on the 48th's DUI commemorates actions in Belgium. Within hours, the lead troops were fighting at the vital cross-roads town of St. Vith. The 23d and 38th AIBs received the Presidential Unit Citation for their outstanding defensive stand at St. Vith and were decorated "for outstanding performance of duty in action from 17 to 23 December 1944, inclusive, at St. Vith, Belgium. Combat Command B, 7th Armored, was subjected to repeated tank and infantry attacks, which grew in intensity as the German forces attempted to destroy the stubborn defenses that were denying to them the use of the key communication center at St. Vith. By the second day, the flanks were constantly threatened by enemy forces that had bypassed the St. Vith area and pushed far to the rear in an effort to encircle the command east of the Salm River. The attacking forces were repeatedly thrown back by the gallant troops who rose from their foxholes and fought in fierce hand-to-hand combat to stop the penetrations and inflict heavy losses on the numerically superior foe. As the command continued to deny the important St. Vith highway and railroad center to the Germans, the entire offensive lost its initial impetus and their supply columns became immobilized. By 21 December, the German timetable was so disrupted that the enemy was forced to divert a corps to the capture of St. Vith. Under extreme pressure from overwhelming forces, this command, which for six days had held the St. Vith area so gallantly, was



A member of the Dutch underground leads soldiers from the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion on a patrol behind German lines in Neerkant, Holland, 16 October 1944. (National Archives)



LEFT: Soldiers from the Mortar Platoon, Headquarters Company, 48th Armored Infantry Battalion, fire an 81mm mortar near Overloon, Holland, 20 October 1944. (National Archives)

RIGHT: Soldiers from the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion ride on an M4 Sherman tank in Weitzlar, Germany, 27 March 1945. (National Archives)



ordered to withdraw west of the Salm River. By their epic stand, without prepared defenses and despite heavy casualties, Combat Command B, 7th Armored, inflicted crippling losses and imposed great delay upon the enemy by a masterful and grimly determined defense in keeping with the highest tradition of the Army of the United States.”

After their defense of St. Vith, the battalions quickly regrouped and returned to the offense, retaking St. Vith. For this action as part of the 7th Armored Division, they again received awards and citations.

In an order of the day decree to the Belgian Army, the Prince of Belgium issued a citation which included the following: “During passing over to the attack on 20 January in the St. Vith sector where it had fought previously, the 7th Armored Division pushed the enemy out of the position that it had been organizing for two weeks and pushed it without respite seven kilometers beyond the Belgian frontier, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. During these nine days it captured more than one thousand prisoners.”

As the battalions advanced into Germany, their superb conduct resulted in the award of the French Fourragere by the President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, in part for their quick and vicious advances into Germany.

By war’s end in Europe on 8 May 1945, the 48th’s battalions had fought with the 7th Armored Division (nicknamed “Lucky Seventh”), establishing a combat record that stretched for 2,260 miles from the beaches of Normandy to the Baltic Sea. Two members were awarded the Medal of Honor: Staff Sergeant Robert H. Dietz, 38th AIB (awarded posthumously), and Corporal Thomas J. Kelly, 48th AIB. After serving in the occupation forces, the battalions returned to the United States in the fall of 1945. The 23d AIB was inactivated on 11 October at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey; the 38th AIB was inactivated on 10 October at Camp Shanks, New York; and the 48th AIB was inactivated on 8 October at Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts.

When the Korean War led to a buildup of the U.S. Army, Camp Roberts, California, a World War II training center, was reactivated in July 1950. In addition to the Infantry and Artillery Centers started in World War II, an Armor Replacement Training Center was also added to the camp. The three armored infantry battalions, 23d, 38th, and 48th, were activated 24 November 1950 and served as the cadre and drill instructors for newly inducted trainees. As the Korean War ended, the battalions were inactivated on 15 November 1953.

In 1957, the 23d, 38th, and 48th AIBs were consolidated to form the 48th Infantry, a parent unit under the Combat Arms Regimental System. The regiment’s battalions were redesignated as armored rifle battalions (ARB), relieved from assignment from the 7th Armored Division, and reassigned to other units. The 1st ARB, 48th Infantry, was activated at Fort Polk and assigned to the 1st Armored Division (Old Ironsides). The 2d ARB, 48th Infantry, was assigned to the 3d Armored Division (Spearhead) in Gelnhausen, West Germany, to help stop any Soviet attack through the historic Fulda Gap. In 1958, the 1st ARB, 48th Infantry, was posted to Worms, West Germany, to defend the



**ABOVE:** An armored personnel carrier from 1-48 Infantry crosses the Rhine River near Worms, Germany, during training exercises in 1964. (U.S. Army)



**LEFT:** A soldier from 1-48 Infantry fires her M-16 rifle during training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, 2008. (U.S. Army)

Rhine River crossing as part of the U.S. 7th Army. In 1963, both battalions were redesignated as mechanized infantry battalions of the 48th Infantry, and the 1st Battalion joined the 2d as part of 2d Brigade, 3d Armored Division, at Gelnhausen. After thirty-two years of defending Western Europe against potential communist aggression, both battalions were inactivated and personnel re-flagged in June 1989. Under new colors, many former Dragoons (a nickname for the 48th’s soldiers referring to the regiment’s motto) participated in Operation Desert Storm.

On 16 June 1989, the 48th was withdrawn from the Combat Arms Regimental System, reorganized under the United States Army Regimental System, and transferred to the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command. The 1st Battalion was reactivated on 15 April 1996 and assigned to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where it conducts gender-integrated basic combat training to produce confident, competent, physically fit, disciplined soldiers, immersed in the seven Army Values, and ready to take their place in the Army upon graduation. ☐

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*A 1962 graduate of the Citadel with a degree in History, Carl Erickson was a platoon leader in the 48th Infantry in West Germany. He later served in the U.S. Army Reserve with the 317th Infantry before earning an MBA and focusing on a forty-three year career as a corporate planning and finance executive. He retired from the Department of Homeland Security in 2007 and maintains contact with the 48th Infantry.*